

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L MONROVIA 2810

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: OVIP (CARTER, JIMMY)

SUBJECT: THE PRESIDENTIAL VISIT TO LIBERIA IN RETROSPECT

REFS (A) MONROVIA 2473 (B) MONROVIA 2506 (C) MONROVIA 2598

(D) MONROVIA 2669

1. THIS TELEGRAM SUMMARIZES FOR THE RECORD SALIENT ASPECTS OF THE VISIT TO LIBERIA APRIL 3 OF PRESIDENT JIMMY CARTER, INCLUDING VISIT PREPARATIONS AND AFTERMATH. CONTENT OF SUBSTANTIVE DISCUSSIONS HAS BEEN REPORTED IN REFTELS B AND C.

2. PREPARATIONS: PREPARATIONS FOR THE PRESIDENTIAL VISIT BEGAN IN EARLY MARCH AND GAVE THE MISSION AN OPPORTUNITY TO WORK IN DAILY AND CLOSE COLLABORATION WITH A JOINT WORKING GROUP HEADED ON THE GOL SIDE BY MINISTER OF STATE FOR PRESIDENTIAL AFFAIRS E. REGINALD TOWNSEND. WHATEVER MIGHT BE SAID ABOUT THE EFFICIENCY OF THE MIDDLE AND LOWER RANKS OF THE GOL CIVIL SERVICE, THE U.S. MISSION, DURING THESE FOUR WEEKS, CAME TO HAVE A HIGH APPRECIATION FOR THE ABILITIES, ENERGY AND GOODWILL OF THEIR LIBERIAN COUNTERPARTS ON THIS JOINT WORKING GROUP. MINISTER TOWNSEND WAS PARTICULARLY IMPRESSIVE FOR THE SKILL AND GOOD HUMOR WITH WHICH HE SOLVED PROBLEMS WHICH AROSE IN THE GROUP.

3. THE VISIT: WHEN IT WAS ANNOUNCED LAST YEAR THAT THE PRESIDENT WOULD MAKE HIS FIRST TRIP TO AFRICA BUT WOULD NOT BE CONFIDENTIAL

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VISITING LIBERIA, THERE WAS CONSTERNATION WITHIN THE GOL. PRESS OF OTHER BUSINESS CAUSED CANCELLATION, WHICH WAS FOLLOWED BY RE-SCHEDULING FOR APRIL 1978. THIS TIME LIBERIANS WERE HEARTENED BY INCLUSION OF LIBERIA IN THE ITINERARY, ALTHOUGH SOME FRETTE OVER THE FACT THAT THE PRESIDENT WAS MAKING SUCH A BRIEF STOP (THREE HOURS) IN LIBERIA. THE POINT OF VIEW OF LIBERIANS AS EXPRESSED TO EMBASSY PERSONNEL WAS THAT AFTER 130 YEARS OF A

SPECIAL FRIENDSHIP, THE U.S. OWED LIBERIA MORE THAN AN AIRPORT STOP. THE DECISION TO BRING THE PRESIDENT INTO MONROVIA, WHERE MORE OF THE POPULACE WOULD HAVE A CHANCE TO SEE HIM, WAS A CAUSE OF SATISFACTION TO THE GOL, ALTHOUGH GRUMBLINGS COULD STILL BE HEARD FROM SOME WHO POINTED OUT THAT THE PRESIDENT WOULD BE STAYING THREE NIGHTS IN LAGOS.

4. THESE CONCERNS EVAPORATED RAPIDLY AS THE PRESIDENT'S VISIT BEGAN WITH THE TOUCH-DOWN OF AIR FORCE ONE AT 11:20 A.M. APRIL 3. THE LIBERIANS WERE IMPRESSED PARTICULARLY BY THE FACT THAT PRESIDENT CARTER, IN RESPONDING TO PRESIDENT TOLBERT'S WELCOMING REMARKS AT ROBERTS INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT, USED THE OCCASION TO MAKE AN ELOQUENT STATEMENT OF AMERICAN POLICIES. IT WAS CLEAR FROM CROWD REACTIONS THAT THIS FIRST STATE VISIT TO LIBERIA BY AN AMERICAN PRESIDENT HAD AROUSED UNUSUAL ENTHUSIASM.

5. VILLAGERS ALONG THE 40 MILE DRIVE FROM ROBERTS INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT TO MONROVIA TURNED OUT IN LARGE NUMBERS TO GREET THE TWO PRESIDENTS. AS THE MOTORCADE APPROACHED THE EXECUTIVE MANSION, IT APPEARED THE CRUSH OF PEOPLE MIGHT BRING THE CONVOY TO A STAND-STILL. EXPATRIATES WHO HAVE LIVED MANY YEARS IN LIBERIA SAID THAT THE EXCITEMENT AND FERVOR OF THE CROWDS WAS UNPRECEDENTED. BEFORE ENTERING THE EXECUTIVE MANSION, THE TRADITIONAL OFFERING OF RICE AND KOLA NUTS WAS MADE BY PARAMOUNT CHIEF JIMMIE DAHN OF THE SACLEPEA CHIEFDOM AND PARAMOUNT CHIEF NOAH (A WOMAN OF BONG COUNTY).

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6. AT THE EXECUTIVE MANSION SEPARATE LUNCHEONS WERE HELD FOR THE PRESIDENT, THE FIRST LADY AND FOR AMY CARTER. LIBERIANS WHO ATTENDED THE PRESIDENT'S LUNCH COMMENTED LATER THAT THEY HAD BEEN MOVED BY THE WARMTH AND SPONTANEITY OF THE REPLY MADE BY PRESIDENT CARTER TO THE TOAST OFFERED BY PRESIDENT TOLBERT. THE LUNCH FOR MRS. CARTER WAS HOSTED BY MRS. TOLBERT AND INCLUDED PROMINENT LIBERIAN WOMEN INCLUDING ASSOCIATE JUSTICE OF THE SUPREME COURT ANGIE BROOKS-RANDOLPH, AGRICULTURE MINISTER FLORENCE CHENOWETH AND HEALTH AND SOCIAL WELFARE MINISTER ABEODU JONES. ONCE AGAIN, THE LIBERIAN PARTICIPANTS WERE IMPRESSED BY THE WARMTH AND SPONTANEITY OF MRS. CARTER'S RESPONSE TO MRS. TOLBERT'S WELCOMING REMARKS. LUNCH FOR AMY CARTER WAS GIVEN IN THE PAVILION ON THE GROUNDS OF THE EXECUTIVE MANSION AND FEATURED A PERFORMANCE BY THE LIBERIAN NATIONAL CULTURAL TROUPE.

7. FOLLOWING THE LUNCHEONS, PRESIDENT AND MRS. CARTER WERE ESCORTED BY PRESIDENT AND MRS. TOLBERT TO THE RECEPTION ROOM ON THE GROUND FLOOR WHERE OFFICIAL PHOTOGRAPHS WERE TAKEN. THE OFFICIAL PARTIES THEN RETURNED TO ROBERTS INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT, WITH A BRIEF, ENTHUSIASTIC STOP AT THE PEACE CORPS HEADQUARTERS. FOLLOWING BRIEF CEREMONIES THE PRESIDENTIAL DEPARTED AT 4:21 P.M.

8. WHAT OPPOSITION THERE WAS TO THE PRESIDENTIAL VISIT WAS CONFINED TO THE RELATIVELY SMALL GROUP OF STUDENT ACTIVISTS (MOSTLY LEFTISTS) FOW IN CONTROL OF THE UNIVERSITY IF LIBERIAN STUDENT UNION. THE ULSU PRESIDENT, CONMANY WESSEH, STARTLED AN ELITE AUDIENCE AT A RECEPTION MARCH 31 HONORING DR. MARY ANTOINETTE BROWN SHERMAN, NEW PRESIDENT OF THE UNIVERSITY OF LIBERIA, BY ATTACKING THE CARTER VISIT AS "UNWANTED, UNNECESSARY AND EXPENSIVE." (FOREIGN MINISTER C. CECIL DENNIS, JR., WHO WAS PRESENT, IMMEDIATELY EXPRESSED HIS REGRETS TO THE EMBASSY REPRESENTATIVE AT THE RECEPTION, STATING THAT THE GOL STANDS FOR FREE SPEECH BUT THE RECEPTION WAS NOT THE PROPER FORUM FOR SUCH AN ATTACK.) THIS PHRASE WAS REPEATED IN AN APRIL 3 ULSU "POSITION STATEMENT" WHICH CALLED PRESIDENT CARTER "THE RINGLEADER OF THE CONFIDENTIAL

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NOTORIOUS WESTERN GANT" AND SPOKE OF THE "CRIMES OF WESTERN IMPERIALISM." WESSEH AND FIVE OF HIS FELLOWS WERE ARRESTED AND HELD FOR TEN HOURS APRIL 3 FOR DISTRIBUTING THIS PAMPHLET. ALTHOUGH WESSEH IS POPULAR ON CAMPUS, HIS EXTREME STAND ON THE CARTER VISIT HAS THE SUPPORT (WE ESTIMATE) OF NO MORE THAN 5 - 10 PERCENT OF THE STUDENT POPULATION.

9. MORE REPRESENTATIVE OF THE GENERAL REACTION TO THE VISIT WAS THE EXUBERANT COMMENT OF PARAMOUNT CHIEF DAHN THAT HE WOULD LONG BE REMEMBERED BY HIS PEOPLE BECAUSE HE HAD "SHOOK THE HAND OF PRESIDENT CARTER DOWN IN MONVOVIA CITY" THE AMBASSADOR HAS RECEIVED MANY LETTERS AND PHONE CALLS FROM LIBERIANS PRAISING THE VISIT. A TYPICAL COMMENT, MADE BY THELMA A. GOLL, RESIDENT MANAGER, LIBERIAN AMERICAN MINING CORPORATION (LAMCL), WAS: "THE SPONTANEOUS AND ENTHUSIASTIC RECEPTION ACCORDED PRESIDENT AND MRS. CARTER WAS A MANIFESTATION OF OUR ESTEEM FOR YOUR COUNTRY'S VALUABLE FRIENDSHIP WHICH WE HAVE ENJOYED SINCE THE FOUNDING OF THIS NATION AND AN EXPRESSION OF OUR SINCERE APPRECIATION FOR THE POLICIES OF THE CARTER ADMINISTRATION." CARTER

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